after his birthday from a heart attack at his home on Feb. 1, 1970. In his career he was awarded two Distinguished Service Medals; one for commanding the 12th Armored in World War II, and the other for leading XVI Corps during the Korean War. A Silver Star was awarded for service during World War II, but I was unable to discover the exact nature of that award for gallantry in action. He also earned the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Army Commendation Medal, and a multitude of campaign ribbons beginning with his service along the Mexican border. Had his aerial reconnaissance duties been conducted during World War I, he would have certainly rated a chest full of Air Medals as well.

The pair of pictures in question seem to come from when the Division operated in Alsace just up to the Battle of Herrlisheim. The close up of Allen's tank is simply labelled "Hagenau" on the back and has an illegible nickname painted on the side. Vehicle nicknames always fascinate me, as they are so personal and often forgotten, save for what you see in a few black and white photographs. Stateside, a photograph was taken of General Allen standing in the commander's position of a similar M5A1 named *Devil* with local Abilene dignitaries bedecked with tanker helmets and goggles inside. As the Division's tanks were issued to the Third Army upon arrival in Europe, I doubt that the tank is one and the same.

Two of DIV HQ's three M5A1 Stuarts, loaded down with an impressive amount of musette bags, duffels, a pair of M3/M6 lightweight gas masks (or their repurposed bags) on the gunner's side of the first tank's turret, and enough concrete-filled sandbags to make Patton [HQ/Third Army] turn red in the face. He believed that such measures to add to a vehicle's armor were ineffective and caused excessive wear on the tanks' drivetrains. Visible is the DIV HQ tactical insignia behind the fender-mounted bedroll.

Of note, in my picture and the one I missed, the main gun and turret-mounted M1919A4 Browning have their canvas covers affixed, and a healthy amount of baggage, including M1936 Musette Bags, duffels, and what appears to be a ration crate cover the Stuart. These details are more visible in my photograph, which also shows a sign that reads "Kolmar," which may be either the actual location of the photograph or a directional sign in Hagenau indicating the way to Colmar/Kolmar, as they are both in the same region. Another detail is the tactical insignia of DIV HQ, a white circle with a bar through it, visible on the sponson where the assistant driver would sit.

As I have written before, DIV HQ M5A1s were often used for taxi duty for officers on important missions, such as the April 8, 1945, mission in which Captain **Fred Levy [CCA/HQ]** borrowed a tank from one of the tank battalions to receive the surrender of a German general. All of the DIV HQ tanks were busy elsewhere and Levy was ambushed and wounded by Germans with panzerfausts. **Herman Zumbroich [CCA/HQ]** was with him and died along with the other two crewmen. If the borrowed Stuart was from the 43rd, as remembered by **Lloyd De Luca [CCA/HQ],** it is likely that **Francis E. Robertson** and **Norman R. Hartman [43]** were with them, as they are the only known men from the 43rd who lost their lives on that day.

I will close for now but will add that I could not resist picking up a few more photos from the grouping that yielded further information. Several more are on the way, and I have narrowed the circumstances of these photographs down to a small group of men who performed valuable work within DIV HQ. Until next month, it is always great to be a Hellcat!

12th AD History

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This month's historian column is the work of several years by dedicated historians and tells the story of the 12th Armored Division's role in one part of the liberation of people enslaved by the Nazi regime in World War II. This project was spearheaded by **Mike Woldenberg [L/56]** and Marshall Coleman who were the primary researchers on this project. Anyone who's ever worked on a team knows that the product is always a collaborative effort. I'm grateful to all team members. Once you read their work, you will be as well. Mike and Marshall, thank you. It's an honor to know you.

~ Bob Scherer [L/66-92]

In Search of Photo 1c: Time, Place and Memory

By Mike Woldenberg [L/56] and Marshall Coleman

On Nov. 29, 2022, the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas received the wartime photobook of Captain **Duaine Eldred [A/92]** reflecting his service during World War II. The carefully constructed album contained strategically placed photos, beginning with those representing the final days of the war when the 12th Armored Division was quickly advancing across Germany in their effort to eliminate the Third Reich. While the Center does not regularly receive these types of gifts, this book was of particular interest due to the compelling liberation pictures at the beginning of the album. Even though each photograph was meticulously labeled, after careful examination it was discovered that the captions did not always match the images. One that especially stood out was of prisoners rushing towards a boxcar with open doors, which was different from many liberation images typically found in archives and museums.

This one picture, which came to be known as Photo 1c (fig 1), not only did not seem to fit with the others on the page, but it was later discovered that it offered a rare glimpse at one of several train rescues that the 12th Armored was a part of 80 years ago at the end of April 1945; a liberation story little known until now. It was then that the journey began to uncover Captain Eldred's route during those final, critical days of the war as a part of a large-scale research project on war photography and the heroic efforts of the 12th to liberate the remnants of European Jewry in the wake of the ongoing systematic genocide.

(fig. 1) ***Photo 1c from the photobook of Captain Duaine Eldred.***

The search for the origins of Photo 1c began with an examination of the movement of the 12th Armored once in country. Although the Germans were nearly surrounded by 1945 after the Battle of the Bulge, Goebbels began to push the rumor of a National Redoubt to the Allies so they would think the Nazis were strong enough to reconstitute themselves with arms and supplies in the Alpine Fortress in southern Bavaria, western Austria, and Italy. In fact, by this time, however, they had all but lost the war. Yet, even after the fighting in the Ardennes Offensive, American troops faced additional intense battles against an unrelenting Wehrmacht. And though concentration camps had already begun to be liberated in the east by the Soviets, the Nazis were still exploiting and torturing their slave laborers, many of whom had been forcibly marched or moved by train back to the center of Germany to be used in munitions factories. It is during these last days in the spring of 1945 as the Allies closed in that the Nazis entrained the remaining sick and starving prisoners, sending them to unknown destinations by the thousands. Unsure as to their fate, the captives found themselves on trains that moved for days in many different directions, sometimes moving forward then reversing on the same track, until finally being stopped by American troops. However, this is only part of the story and still does not solve the quest to find the location of Photo 1c.

While the Eldred photo collection provides extensive insight into the plight of the survivors and events in the final hours of the war, it also chronicles the captain's movement with the 'Hellcats'. Known later for the speed with which they navigated the continent, the Squadron did not arrive in Europe until Nov. 17, 1944, and didn't see combat until Dec. 5 in northern Alsace, France. Here they encountered not just a desperate German enemy, but an especially cold winter. In a last attempt to beat back the Americans, the Germans unleashed Operation Nordwind on Jan. 1, 1945, in an effort to retake Strasbourg and to cut off the Seventh Army. This led to a major battle that began on Jan. 8 in and near the town of Herrlisheim during which the 12th held the line in very hard fighting lasting more than two weeks. After the battle they "needed 1,700 men and 70 combat vehicles to replenish losses."[1] Later, in early February, they helped destroy the Colmar Pocket.

The spring offensive began for the 12th Armored Division when they left Trier on March 17, headed east. The 12th was in the lead for a spectacular 7-day, 72-mile advance of the Third Army to the Rhine. During this mission, the 92nd Cav Recon Squadron was at the tip of the spear. Finding the bridges across the Rhine were blown up, they crossed on a pontoon bridge at Worms on March 28. The 92nd was again the driving force as the division headed east to help take Würzburg. The 12th then raced south, bypassing Nuremberg, reaching Dillingen on the Danube River on April 22. Here, Combat Command A found the bridge was intact. They immediately crossed the Danube at Dillingen, with the 12th leading the way south where many thousands of prisoners and slave laborers awaited liberation.

As the Americans pushed across Germany, the Nazis were growing ever more committed to sabotage, as well as the murder of Jews. Troops were constantly confronted with mined and blown bridges that impeded their access as they made their way south toward the Alpine Fortress. By this time, they were also confronted with an increasing number of German POWs, in addition to a displaced populace and survivors from the east who were sharing the roads alongside them. This caused major complications as they continued with the mission toward Landsberg where they came across Kaufering IV in Hurlach, as well as other subcamps of Dachau on April 27.[2] Unprepared for the reality of what they saw, those who could took snapshots, as did the Signal Corps, who captured the deathscapes with both stills and motion pictures. These invaluable first images of Nazi crimes, which have by now become iconic symbols of the Holocaust, later became tools for the prosecution by the Allies at Nuremberg. Still, however shocking the scenes at Dachau and of its various satellite camps were, they were not the only discoveries. After Kaufering, the 92nd reassembled just north of Landsberg, occupying the airfield there by April 28. Having received false information regarding the end of the war on April 29, the 92nd was ordered to move from Schoffelding and Eresing to Diessen, and then to Fischen just southeast of the Ammersee.

[1] Clifford, Command Sergeant Major James H. "'A Good Day's Work...' The 12th Armored Division in World War II," *On Point,* Spring 2010, 10, https://www.12tharmoreddivisionmuseum.com/_files/ugd/c0865a_af7f3e74183844c3a9face9a2d0669dd.pdf

[2] Seiller, Edward F. Affidavit in Julien Saks file 12th AD Museum.

During the early morning hours of April 30, 1945, Captain Eldred led Troop A of the 92nd Cav Recon Sq Mecz, southeast in order to guard the left flank of the advancing 12th Armored. By 0630, however, Troop A was given new orders and pushed out from Weilheim at 0830 headed towards the Inn River Valley where they were to join members of XV Corps to prevent German troops from passing into the Redoubt. Along the way, they incurred small firefights as they moved toward their immediate objective, Seeshaupt.[3] Although morning reports are inconclusive, according to the division's after-action report for the period, Troop C moved ahead, followed by Troop A toward Penzberg where they encountered heavy fighting.[4] Confronting combatants as they advanced, they also came across trains of prisoners still being held by the Germans. In some cases, these sites needed to be seized and secured, while in others, the locomotives had already been neutralized. Although the waning days of the Germans was imminent, there were still battles going on in the surrounding forests where the enemy was ready to attack the Americans at the first opportunity. It is during one of these daring train rescues that 2,400 prisoners realized their nightmare was slowly coming to an end as the 92nd Cav Recon Sq Mecz stumbled across cars of concentration camp prisoners in Staltach-Iffeldorf (Staltach) at 1015 as the war was coming to a close.[5]

For survivors on the trains, the arrival of the Americans was beyond belief. These larger-than-life rescuers quickly helped those they could while securing German guards at the site. One such Soldier was a crew member of an assault gun force, part of Troop E of the 92nd Cav Recon Squadron. On the morning of April 30, he was sent out on patrol in a jeep with two other men. Within a few hours he participated in the rescue of a stalled train in Staltach, about a half mile from Iffeldorf. A Yiddish speaker, Private **Marvin Dorf [E/92],** was at times called upon to communicate with the newly-captured German soldiers, as well as the survivors. Even though there were numerous American Jews in the 92nd, we know that Dorf was one of the Soldiers at that rescue from survivor testimony and news stories. This encounter is captured, for instance, in the *Morning Freiheit* of July 3, 1945, which recounts Dorf's meeting with one of the prisoners from the train, Benjamin Apel. Amazed to meet an American Jewish soldier, he asked Dorf if he could get word to his brother in Brooklyn of his survival. The private promised the survivor, wrote to his parents who happened to live not too far from Apel's brother, and asked them to let the family know about Benjamin. This, however, was not the only experience of this young GI at Staltach.

In addition to Apel, other survivors such as Herman Idelovici, who was also on that Staltach train, recalls the liberation in a Feb. 5, 1997, letter to the National Museum of American Jewish Military History. Having survived several concentration camps since his deportation in 1942 at the age of 15, he remembers that he was in Allach, a subcamp close to Dachau, as U.S. Troops approached on April 28, 1945. He was put on a long train of boxcars carrying 2,400 prisoners, however, he estimated there were 4,000. For two days the train "went back and forth without any clear destination."[6] The prisoners all worried that they would be murdered by the SS. According to Idelovici, "Suddenly the train stops on the railroad just near a railway station named Staltach. . .[where] on April 30th at about 11 a.m. I was liberated by an advanced guard of a tank company."[7] It was there that Idelovici was greeted by Dorf after another soldier provided him with a pair of shoes and socks; a simple act of kindness that meant so much to him he searched for the soldier 50 years later to thank him.

Another survivor encountered by Dorf was a still-unnamed Polish Jewish woman who was similarly touched by his kindness at liberation. According to the Private's own testimony, the Americans were shaken to the core when they discovered the near-death condition of the prisoners. He says, "We gave them food, clothing and in some cases medical help. I went to some nearby farmers' homes to get some food. I remember four women asking for milk (which they hadn't had in many years). When the farmer did not open the door for them, I kicked it down..."[8] He threatened the farmer and, "they got their milk in five minutes."[9] So moved by this small act of humanity, she gave him a Jewish Star (fig.2) she had "made out of threads from her sweater and small beads (which she kept hidden for prayer)..."[10] A symbol of survival which Dorf first exhibited at the Jewish War Veteran Museum, now housed in the archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); a living testimony of both the survivor and her liberator.

(Fig. 2) ***Photo from website: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This beaded pendant with Star of David was given to Pfc Marvin Dorf by a young Polish Jewish woman after he helped rescue her and her sister from a train in Staltach, Bavaria on 4/30/1945. The train carried an estimated 4,000 slave laborers. The Hebrew letter Hey is displayed in the center of the Star. Hey is found twice in the Hebrew word Yahweh so the single letter stands for God, or the Divine Presence.***

In the aftermath of the war, liberation photos have come to define the American military's role in the fight against fascism during World War II. Yet, despite the oral and written testimony that has been gathered in the years since, it is the pictures that have the greatest impact. Although it is not clear who the photographer was in Photo 1c, the impact of the scenes on the individual behind the lens and whoever constructed the photobook, are profound and express what words cannot capture. These impressions are reflected in the perspective

[3] AAR 92ndCAV RCN SQ MECZ 12th Armored Division 4.
[4] Ibid 4.
[5] AAR 92ndCAV RCN SQ MECZ 12th Armored Division 4.
[6] Herman. Idelovici letter to Jewish War Veteran Headquarters National Museum of American Jewish Military History, February 5, 1997 from the private collection of Marvin Dorf.
[7] Ibid
[8] Rontsh, Y.A. "American Soldiers Liberate Four Thousand Jews from Nazi Death Train." *Morning Freiheit,* New York, July 4, 1945.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

from which the pictures were taken, in the captions on and beneath the photos, and their careful placement in the book. This is especially true for Photo 1c which was clearly shot while in motion from the road above and draws attention to the chaos that the GIs encountered as they found these sights. Critical to the historic archive, the randomness and mislabeled photos hold within them a mystery illustrating how little we still know about the end of the war, as well as the genocide. Moreover, since emphasis in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust was typically based on survivor testimony and the camp experience, few after the war made detailed explorations into those last hours and what the photos have come to represent. Even more important, the notion of the Allies as "liberators" became a moniker that quickly attached itself to many troops in the vicinity of a camp as Europe was secured. It wasn't until the 1980's and the opening of the USHMM that an intense discussion regarding who should be credited for the liberation of the camps became a highly charged debate.

Early in the design process of the museum, the United States Holocaust Council Days of Remembrance Committee, then chaired by Sigmund Strochlitz and Benjamin Meed, contacted the U.S. Army in February 1985 to invite them to display a permanent flag exhibit at the future museum representing all the units responsible for the liberation of the concentration camps. The chairs' request was accompanied by an invitation to make the presentation of the flags at a commemoration ceremony planned for the Capitol Rotunda in April of that same year. Thus, 40 years after the end of the war, the Army, in an endeavor to make sure every unit received credit, began a hasty investigation of all troops which might have arrived on site within minutes, or even hours, at camps across Europe. It was a list that had been marginalized because of the chaotic conditions at the end of the war, the refugee crisis, and continued fighting in the Pacific Theater. In addition, unbeknownst to the parties involved, it would take another 20 plus years for the enormity of the Nazi camp system to be exposed. As a result, the initial list was small as only those troops who had been present at the larger camps were given credit. To meet the April 1985 deadline, the U.S. Center for Military History, the institution in charge of researching the liberators, in connection with the United States Holocaust Council, established the 48-hour rule stating that any unit providing resources at a liberation within that timeframe would be credited as a liberator. And as far as the data available illustrates, to this day, the list is primarily limited to known camp sites. As a result, by 1987 veterans began to gather survivor testimony, in addition to filing depositions testifying to their presence at numerous rescues under the new guidelines. It is during this period that the 12th was finally acknowledged for its role as a liberating force.

The 12th Armored was finally honored at the dedication of the new U.S. Holocaust Museum on April 22, 1993. This acknowledgment, however, still did not consider those survivors who were freed by the Hellcats as they fought the Germans in April 1945. Consequently, the Eldred photobook has become a critical part of the liberation narrative. Moving as swiftly as it did along the European countryside toward the German interior, the last thing on the minds of this division was providing aid and comfort to the captives. In fact, in GI post-war interviews, many have said they only had a faint knowledge of what was transpiring in the camps and could not have imagined the level of human destruction they discovered until they witnessed it for themselves. This makes their photos even more relevant to the story of the war. Additionally, it was not until many years later that some Hellcat veterans realized the division had not received credit for the liberations they had been a part of due to the inefficient chronicling by the different agencies in the post-war period.

The discovery of Captain Eldred's photos, therefore, becomes a pivotal point in the ongoing conversation about liberation. A discussion which is needed not only addresses the heroics of the men of the 12th Armored Division in battle, but also properly acknowledges these troops for their part in saving survivors from certain death on the trains represented in his photobook. Long before information was processed and pictures were shared, the 12th was quickly deactivated in December 1945. Thus, stories about the heroism of this particular group of American GIs and their attempt to save the remnant of survivors at camps and captured trains full of dead, critically ill, and barely living prisoners at the end of April 1945, was rarely discussed. The men, however, knew that they had shared a brotherhood like no other in what they had done across Europe. For many, the recognition was unimportant because what they accomplished was larger than themselves. The service itself was their motivation. As Patrick Timmons recalled in a post war interview in 1998, on the day they found out the war was over, they were sharing a beer when their sergeant remarked: "you know fellas, I wish the war was still on." Timmons then states, "to a man, every one of us agreed with him, it was something about the combat. . . in fact, in the movie *Saving Private Ryan* where the heroes meet up with him and he refused to leave - I could well appreciate his feelings. The whole platoon, I think sitting at that table agreed."[11] Dealing with the end of the war and their final mission as a unit, foremost in the minds of these men was the camaraderie they shared, the feat they had accomplished, and their return home. The last thing they thought of was the recognition they would receive for their duty in the post-war era.

For soldiers like Dorf, the duty to ease the suffering of the survivors became their final mission of the war. As he states in the letter he wrote to his parents after the liberation: "I can't tell you here the traumatic things I've seen with my own eyes nor what I've heard in this letter, and I'll try to forget them quickly. . . From now on, we will be taking good care of these unfortunate ones."[12] As Private Dorf's letter demonstrates, the majority of the men in the 12th would not have thought twice about their recognition as liberators. Yet, the work on Photo 1c and the Mystery Division has brought more to light than one would have expected and shows there is still much work to be done. It would take 42 years after the war to name the 12th as a liberating force, and another 38 beyond that to discover a previously unknown photo collection reflecting the bravery of those who served, and the grateful survivors whose memory remains in a long forgotten, faded photo book that has been waiting to be found.

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[11] Timmons, Patrick J. "Interview of Patrick Timmons." By Vernon A. Williams, November 21, 1998 (1:56:21).

[12] Rontsh, Y.A. "American Soldiers Liberate Four Thousand Jews from Nazi Death Train." *Morning Freiheit,* New York, July 4, 1945.